

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF  
**COMMERCE**

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THE BIG JOB AHEAD

Remarks by Francis C. Turner, Acting Federal Highway Administrator, prepared for delivery at the 58th Meeting, Mississippi Valley Conference of State Highway Departments, Chicago, Illinois, March 16, 1967

It is a pleasure, as always, to meet with the Mississippi Valley Conference of State Highway Departments. I think these regional meetings of State highway officials are of tremendous value for at least two reasons. First, being relatively small as compared with the annual AASHO meetings, and frequently including more of the operating people along with the policy makers, they provide an opportunity for more intimate discussion of mutual problems involving the highway departments and the Bureau of Public Roads. Second, they serve the function of updating matters discussed at the AASHO meeting and exploring new developments of mutual interest.

We are not standing still in terms of the tangible measurements of progress. At the time of your last meeting about \$24.7 billion had been put to work on the Interstate System and \$19.6 billion on the Federal-aid primary and secondary systems in the years since 1956. Today these totals have risen to \$28.8 billion Interstate and \$21.43 billion ABC. A year ago 21,185 miles of the Interstate System were in use. Now we have 23,476 miles open to traffic, a gain of 2,291 miles, compared with 2,166 during the previous year. Corresponding progress was recorded in mileage placed under construction or upon which engineering or acquisition of right-of-way was in progress, so that as of now barely 4 percent of the 41,000-mile System remains to be advanced to the preliminary design and processing status.

In planning my remarks here today we dug out Rex Whitton's talk to you of last year to refresh my memory as to what issues and problems were foremost in the minds of highway officials at that time. The Highway Beautification Act had been enacted a few months previously and the Highway Safety bill had just been introduced in Congress but not yet passed. I want to talk a little about progress in both of those areas and some of the challenges that lie ahead, but first I want to touch briefly on what I consider to be the most significant development at the Federal level since your last meeting.

I'm referring to the creation of the Department of Transportation, which is now in being but, understandably, still in the shakedown stage. It will be officially activated on April 1. When I called it the year's most significant development, I was talking in terms of the logical grouping under one head of most of the travel and transport-oriented Federal agencies to work toward an efficient, integrated total transportation system. As to the traditional, cooperative relationship between the Bureau and the State highway departments, it has been stated that there will be no substantive change.

If any shift is indicated, I think it might be that we must all become still more "transportation conscious" in addition to our being "highway conscious." This is not so much because of the new Department as because of the changing nature of our society -- greater affluence, more leisure time, ever-increasing urbanization and many other factors -- all of which place apparently limitless demands on the Nation's transportation plant, including the highway network which can never be considered as a separate thing. The highway engineer must broaden his role to that of transportation engineer if he is to fulfill his complete potential and responsibility, and this change would have had to occur, even without a new Department of Transportation -- indeed the change has been in process for some time, even before the Department of Transportation was proposed.

Having said that, I'll get back to some of the problems of more immediate and direct concern to the State highway officials and to the Bureau of Public Roads. In doing so, I am not taking them up in any particular order or assigning priorities -- with one exception. In my opinion the greatest challenge facing the highway engineer of today and as far ahead as we can see is to build safety into the new highways and to remove the accident hazards which exist on the old ones. And when I speak of highways, I'm talking not only about the riding surface, but also the shoulders, the right-of-way and the adjacent land to the extent that we have any control over it.

Like the weather, everybody talks about the disgraceful traffic death toll -- now running at 52,000 a year -- but not enough people are doing enough about it, and I'm afraid this has been historically true even of us as highway engineers. True, traffic accidents are due to any one of many factors, and most frequently to a combination of several of these. Some of these problems, such as defects in the vehicle and the driver, have been assigned essentially at the national level to the new Safety Agency. This agency will operate in tandem with the Bureau of Public Roads as a part of the new Federal Highway Administration in the Department of Transportation.

It is clearly the responsibility of the Bureau and the State highway departments to provide the safest, most foolproof roadway and roadside possible within the limits of available funds. That is our area of expertise and responsibility and the one for which we will be held accountable by both elected officials and the public.

Aside from building safety into the new Interstate and other modern highways, we have an even larger assignment in removing the deadly boobytraps from older ones. This is being done on an encouraging scale through the spot improvement program, which was undertaken in March 1964, to rid the Federal-aid systems of accident-inducing features by September 1, 1969. Nearly all States have now completed their inventories of hazardous locations and developed plans to correct them. These include projects which will be carried out with Federal-aid and State matching funds, as well as those to be accomplished entirely with State money. I must insist that we so organize our work plans as to meet the 1969 deadline because many a life and limb are dependent on our actions. I must say in all candor that we're going to have to materially step up our efforts beyond mere inventories and plans if we are to reach that goal on time.

One of the toughest safety problems, though, is not concerned with the highway surface itself but with the roadside and right-of-way. Accidents involving cars running off the road and striking a lethal object too close to the roadway are commonplace -- except to the unfortunate victims. Any program to enhance traffic safety is only a partial approach if it fails to come to grips with the presence of such deadly obstructions which may kill or maim. These include such things as lighting poles, catch basins, curbs, bridge abutments and piers, not to mention some of the ends of our guardrails which -- ironically enough -- may themselves cause death rather than prevent it. We must also get more uniformity and enlightenment in such fields as signing, signals and markings so that we don't confuse the motorist and thereby create still another accident hazard.

In regard to roadside obstructions, the Bureau has issued several memoranda on the subject, the latest and most comprehensive of which was an Instructional Memorandum dated August 1, 1966. Of greater importance is the Report of the Special AASHO Traffic Safety Committee, covering a study of the problem in depth and presenting enlightened recommendations to cope with it. The Report is now in the final stages and will be sent to the printers in a few days. It is intended to be the basic handbook of what to do in this endeavor. Over the long range I'm sure it will pay off a thousand fold for the blood, sweat and tears of many statistical victims, which should forcefully remind us of our responsibility to eliminate these hazards so there will be no repetitions.

I have talked at some length about highway safety because, as I indicated earlier, I consider it our greatest challenge in the whole catalogue of problems ahead of us. There are many others. The public has indicated quite vocally that it wants not only more, better and safer highways, but more beautiful highways. We must crank considerations of both safety and esthetics into our daily operations on every project.

The Bureau is now working toward a more rapid and, we believe, more effective and practical implementation of the beautification program by adopting a simpler approach. It is expected that less sophisticated, less formal projects will serve to enhance the natural beauty of the countryside on a broader scope, at less cost, and in less time than the more elaborate approach contained in a number of projects being submitted to us. Action toward this change in emphasis is well underway and should be operational soon.

We are proceeding to implement the Highway Beautification Act of 1965 in all its aspects. The final draft of suggested standards for the control of outdoor advertising has been developed and the Secretary of Transportation is ready to begin negotiations with the States, as they become ready from the States' side. An estimate of cost of the entire beautification package based on two differing program levels has been sent to Congress. Standards for the control of junkyards -- some 17,500 of them -- are nearing the final stages of formulation.

I might remind you that, although the Beautification Act does not require junkyards to be removed or otherwise disposed of until July 1, 1970, Federal funds are currently available for this purpose. As an example of ingenuity in this area, in one State a junkyard having 84 car bodies was entirely cleared by burying on the premises at a low bid of \$760. A trench, 120 feet long, 15 feet wide and 10-12 feet deep was dug with a bulldozer. The car bodies were moved into position beside the trench where each was flattened by the tractor. They were then pushed into the trench, further compacted and the trench backfilled. The area will be seeded in the spring.

I want to refer briefly to two other matters closely allied to the beautification program. On March 1, the Department of Commerce released a study of scenic roads and parkways prepared for the President's Council on Recreation and Beauty. For study purposes, State and Federal agencies nominated some 136,500 miles of routes for consideration as scenic roads and parkways. Under one of several alternative proposals developed by the study team, some 50,000 miles of scenic roads and parkways would be designated for development in a national program. Roughly 80 percent of the mileage would be on existing roads, while about 20 percent would be on new location.

An important characteristic of the proposed programs involves many types of facilities associated with recreational travel along the scenic routes. Under one proposal, such facilities would be made available every 3.4 miles along the designated roads and parkways. Picnic areas would be planned at average intervals of 14 miles; campgrounds, 21 miles; boat launching facilities, 34 miles; scenic overlooks, 16 miles; cultural, historic, or educational sites at 97 miles; and rest stops every 31 miles.

This is just one highlight from the report. I mention it because it may be part of the big job ahead -- how far ahead I wouldn't hazard a guess, but it very probably is part of the eventual shape of things to come. The report is prefaced by a statement that no program can be proposed until after the Vietnam conflict.

The other matter I wanted to mention is in connection with the preservation of natural beauty and historical sites. Both the Federal-aid Highway Act of 1966 and the Transportation Act contain requirements for special consideration of parklands, conservation areas, historical sites and similar facilities. The Bureau is developing policy memoranda on these two enactments and they will be issued shortly.

However, in floor debate it was brought out that the legislative intent was much broader than would appear to be indicated by the appropriate section of the Transportation Act. Chairman Kluczynski of the House Roads Subcommittee and Representative Rostenkowski cautioned against protection of parks, open spaces and similar resources to the total exclusion of other considerations. Congressman Kluczynski includes the integrity of neighborhoods, displacement of people and businesses and protection of schools and churches among the other social and human values which are to be given full consideration.

Social and human values. You have heard these words many times in the past couple of years and it must be plain to everyone by now that they are not passing phrases. One of the thorniest problems in this area, of course, is the dislocation mentioned by Chairman Kluczynski. In 1962, you will recall, the law governing Federal aid for the first time provided for some assistance to families and businesses required to move because of Federal-aid highway construction. Where the State can legally pay moving expenses, the Federal Government will share the costs. But unfortunately, up to now, four years after enactment of this legislation, only 35 States are paying moving costs to those displaced.

The Bureau has been studying this problem and no doubt recommendations will go to Congress this spring. The thinking is along the lines of both liberalizing the relocation program, including the payments allowed, and bringing about a uniform practice among all Federal agencies which deal with this problem. An allied study, also near completion, involves the need for and benefits to accrue from a program of advance acquisition of rights-of-way for Federal-aid highways.

I am not going into problems that are exclusively urban in any great depth today because Rex Whitton covered both the problems and some of the proposed solutions quite thoroughly at Wichita. Urban traffic congestion is a problem that just won't go away by itself and it will tax the ingenuity of the engineers and planners for as far ahead as I can see.

I do want to mention in passing two points in this connection which are relatively new. One is the policy permitting the use of Federal highway funds on certain city streets not previously considered eligible for Federal aid. I'm sure you are familiar with it by now but for those who are not, the new policy involves inclusion in the Federal-aid primary system of additional arterial streets in areas of 5,000 or more population for the purpose of making them eligible to receive Federal aid for traffic operation improvement only, but not for major construction or reconstruction projects. This new procedure, of course, has a double application -- helping to relieve urban traffic congestion by making greater use of presently available streets, and enhancing traffic safety. We refer to this program under the code name of TOPICS -- Traffic Operations to Increase Capacity and Safety.

The other problem I want to mention in this context is that cities continue to lag far behind needs in the provision of off-street parking facilities. As a result, many urban streets continue to be used to a large extent for vehicle storage rather than for moving traffic. Under existing legislation, as you know, Federal-aid funds cannot be used to participate in the provision of parking or terminal facilities. But some solution must be found and the Bureau is conducting a study this year of the merits of making Federal-aid available for this purpose. This is another part of the TOPICS program which seeks to increase the traffic carrying capability of what we already have.

This parking study, unlike the others completed or underway, was not ordered by Congress but I believe we should take the initiative when there is a problem in our area of responsibility and a solution is needed as we have always done before. You are thoroughly familiar with two of the other <sup>three</sup> studies we have underway but I will mention all three because they in themselves spell out the size of the job ahead. They are:

1. A revised report on the cost of completing the Interstate System, to be submitted in January 1968. The changing and growing costs of construction and right-of-way, plus new design concepts, require a new look by Congress at the time schedule for completing the System as well as means of providing the necessary financing. This report is actually a part of

2. a report on the future highway needs of the Nation, including recommendations regarding the Federal interest in meeting these needs as part of a larger study of total transportation needs, and

3. a joint report by the Secretary of Transportation and the Secretary of Agriculture on the means of providing adequate protection against soil erosion on highway construction projects.

I have touched only lightly on some of the elements of the big job ahead and have even skipped some completely. The highway engineer and the highway administrator have faced some tough challenges in history -- from getting the country out of the mud to planning and building the Interstate System and helping to plan and shape our urban areas. But I think the years ahead will probably bring to us an even larger number of greater challenges than ever before. But along with challenges go opportunities and let's think in those terms, as we continue our enviable record of leadership and accomplishment in our important chosen field of endeavor.